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THE PROPER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE PRESS IN WAR

PREPARED BY THE WAR COLLEGE DIVISION, GENERAL STAFF CORPS
AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE STATEMENT OF A PROPER MILITARY
POLICY FOR THE UNITED STATES

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SYNOPSIS.

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THE PROPER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE PRESS IN WAR.

1. INFLUENCE OF THE PRESS ON THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR.

When other means have failed and the country has decided on war the Army and Navy are the only agencies of the Government by which it can obtain its desired ends. They become paramount, and every utility and influence within the country should be brought to their aid.

The press, powerful in peace, may become more so in war. By its editorials and presentation of news it may sway the people for or against the war and thus stimulate recruiting and hearten and encourage the fighting forces in their work or, by adverse criticism, may tend to destroy the efficiency of these agencies.

Again by publishing news of the movements and numbers of our own troops valuable information can be conveyed to the enemy.

2. INSTANCES OF MILITARY SUCCESSES RESULTING FROM INFORMATION GLEANED FROM THE PRESS DURING PAST WARS.

During the Crimean War the Russians gained very reliable information regarding the works in the trenches of the allied armies and the progress of the siege of Sebastopol from the English newspapers.

In the American Civil War the northern generals obtained exact and valuable information through the Confederate papers. After the fall of Atlanta, Jefferson Davis, speaking at Macon and Palmetto, stated that measures had been taken in Tennessee and Kentucky to cut off Sherman's supplies from the North, and that having an army in his front and rear, in a hostile land, he must be annihilated. These speeches, published in the southern and reproduced in the northern press, soon reached Sherman. Acting on this information, and in order to keep his communication free, the Federal general began his famous march through Georgia to the sea. The reports of his successful progress, which appeared in the southern press, enabled Grant to send supplies to meet him at the coast.

In July, 1870, Maj. Krause, of the German staff, was able by means of French newspapers to ascertain the composition and strategical disposition of all the French corps.

When McMahon in 1870 attempted his disastrous march to the relief of Bazaine in Metz, to the success of which secrecy was essential, his movements became known to Prussian headquarters through English and French newspapers.

An instance, though of less importance, may be quoted from the other side, when, on the 8th of December, 1870, Gen. Faidherbe assumed the offensive with 30,000 men of the Army of the North, he made his diversion by way of St. Quentin, having learned from the Prussian newspapers that the first German army was in Normandy.

During the Spanish War the success of the Cuban expedition of May, 1898, was seriously menaced by the news in the American press concerning the concentration at Tampa. Every military movement was reported in the American newspapers, and the Spanish Government had, within two or three hours, complete accounts of the American preparation for war.

As an example of the importance of excluding from the press all mention of military movements, the following may be related:

When it became evident to our Military Information Division in 1897 that war was certain to occur between the United States and Spain an attempt was made to discover not only the numbers but the garrisons of the Spanish Army in Cuba. This was an extremely difficult task, because there was little, if any, direct information upon the subject, the Spanish Government having, so far as known, discontinued the practice of announcing in orders the departure of troops for the island. But the division was a subscriber for the chief Spanish newspapers, both before the war and during its progress. In these newspapers mention would be made now and then of an action at such and such a place in Cuba, the name of the regiment and battalion being given. By carefully compiling such mentions during a space of time extending over many months the Military Information Division was enabled to arrive at a really accurate estimate of the strength of the Spanish forces in Cuba, with their supplies of ammunition and other resources, and, moreover, enabled to state the composition of the various garrisons scattered throughout the island. This information naturally was of the very greatest value to our Government. It would have been of still greater value had land operations in Cuba lasted. Now, most of this information was gathered, as already said, from the newspapers, but not from formal statements of the departure of troops, giving their number, destination, and regiment or other unit, but from the most casual and, as it were, accidental mention of regiments and actions in the island by the Madrid papers from time to time. These mentions were so broken in character that it perhaps never occurred to the Spanish that they could be made the solid foundation of accurate information as to the strength of Spanish garrisons in the island, but slight and

insignificant as these data were, taken item by item, they, nevertheless, were made to yield a most important result; a thing that would have been impossible had the Spanish press been totally silent on the subject of the troops serving in Cuba. Subsequent events showed that these estimates were almost exactly correct.

3. CONTROL OF PRESS BY JAPAN IN RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR.

Japan was the first nation to completely take control of the press. In the early days of her war with Russia editors of Japanese newspapers were expressly prohibited from publishing the details regarding the organization, mobilization, or transportation of their country's naval and military forces. A warning was addressed to them emphasizing the power of the press to mar plans of operations, instances being cited from the Chinese-Japanese War of 1894-95; and an appeal was made to their patriotism to suppress any information which, however interesting to the public, might be of use to the enemy or give him the least indication of Japanese intentions or movements. How loyally the Japanese press had responded to this appeal is proved by the impenetrable mystery which shrouded the movements of Admiral Togo's ships and the marches of Marshal Oyama's armies.

The treatment of foreign newspaper correspondents by the Japanese is well expressed in a cartoon of *London Punch*, which pictured a Japanese officer blindfolding a correspondent, and as remarking, "Abjectly we desire to distinguish honorable newspaper man by honorable badge." The blindfolding of the foreign correspondents caused much ill feeling against Japan, and was expressed in many articles published after these correspondents returned to their countries, but Japan gained her purpose.

4. CONTROL OF PRESS BY BULGARIA.

In the first Balkan war Bulgaria's mobilization and concentration was kept secret even from her own people. Correspondents after the concentration were received, though they were not permitted to see or report anything of value. Correspondents were, however, free to leave as they pleased, and after they crossed the boundary could publish what they pleased. Many false reports of movements, etc., were sent from neutral cities by correspondents who had never been at the front.

5. CONTROL OF PRESS BY GREAT BRITAIN IN PRESENT WAR.

In the present European conflict all nations engaged have instituted a rigorous censorship. Great Britain's experience must be of greater interest to us, as conditions there are more nearly similar to our own.

Great Britain appears at first to have had two distinct organizations dealing with censorship: First, the press bureau, from which is given out such news as the Government desires to publish, and to which articles and dispatches to London newspapers are submitted for confirmation, permission to publish without confirmation, or suppression; second, the cable censors who pass on all cables filed, whether private, business, or journalistic. There is in addition a censorship on mail to hostile countries.

In addition to the main press bureau, there has been established in the foreign office a publicity bureau for the purpose of issuing information favorable to the allies.

There also exists in the admiralty a censorship of wireless.

This censorship has its authority in the general act giving to the naval and military officials the legal right to take such steps as might be necessary for the defense of the realm.

For the period preceding the declaration of war, and for several days thereafter (until Aug. 11), there was no official or organized press bureau. However, the proprietors and editors of the great newspapers, irrespective of class or party, all combined to take no notice of questions which the Admiralty or war office did not want referred to. Later the cable censorship became incorporated in the press bureau, and all press telegrams were censored at the Government central telegraph office. Cablegrams from abroad were sent by pneumatic tube to the central office, and after a censor's action sent to the addressee. Telegrams and cablegrams filed at any office were sent to the central office and after a censor's action placed on the Government lines or delivered to the company operating the cable. All press representatives were registered and any bulletin given out by the press bureau was simultaneously dictated to all. None could use it till all had received it. Before this change, made about September 1, 1914, much criticism had been expressed of the methods employed, particularly that some censors permitted dispatches to pass which other censors prohibited. No correspondents were allowed at the front. Daily communiques or bulletins were issued from army headquarters, and these have been supplemented by weekly descriptions given out as written by an "eyewitness."

It is understood that when the Dardanelles' expedition was planned that the active heads of the great papers were called to the war office and informed that but one correspondent would be permitted with the expedition. The newspapers were to decide on this man, and he would be in honor bound to send nothing but what was passed by the censor. Mr. Ashmead Bartlett was chosen for this purpose.

The censorship has caused much criticism and discontent in England. The Government has been interpellated in Parliament, and

the press, particularly the Northcliffe papers, publish violent editorial comment.

At first there was much confusion, due to the inexperience of the censors and to the lack of system; this seems now to be partly remedied.

It was claimed, not without reason, that recruiting was impeded; later, when more accurate statements of the losses in Flanders were permitted to be published, recruiting was greatly stimulated.

6. CONTROL OF PRESS BY FRANCE IN PRESENT WAR.

In France, at the outbreak of the war, the Government took advantage of the parliamentary act of 1850, which specifies that the military government shall have the right to suppress newspapers for disobedience of instructions given concerning the publication of military information. At the call of mobilization, shortly before war was declared, the ministry in power commenced the organization of a bureau of press censorship.

In a session of August 5, the *Chambre de Deputes* passed a special act describing the military censorship to be established for the duration of the present war, but generally limiting the power of the censor to military and diplomatic information, political matters being excluded.

France, as in other nations, first permitted no correspondents at the front; later, certain well-vouched-for newspaper men have been taken on personally conducted tours. The army issues daily communiques, supplemented by periodical "eyewitness" stories, which are carefully worded and which, of course, contain nothing of value to the enemy.

7. CONTROL OF PRESS BY GERMANY IN PRESENT WAR.

Germany, as in all matters of preparation, was forehanded in her laws, and it was only necessary to issue the necessary decrees or orders prohibiting the publication of military information. While guarding the publication of useful military information, she has used the press to her advantage by permitting carefully conducted tours to the front of accredited newspaper men, especially neutral correspondents, and permitting them to publish interesting "human interest" stories, all showing Germany in a favorable light, but containing nothing of value to the enemy.

8. INFLUENCE OF PRESS ON SUCCESS OF THE ARMY.

The above has been written with a view of showing the influence that the press can have on the success of armies and the steps that

have been taken by foreign nations to prevent the publication of information valuable to the enemy.

There are two ways in which the press has a direct influence on the success of the army:

First. It may, by publishing names of organizations, numbers, movements, accounts of victories or defeats, furnish information to the enemy that will enable him to deduct the strength and location and intended movements of our own troops.

Second. By criticism of the conduct of campaigns, the action of certain officers or exploiting others, the people will be led to lose confidence in the army with the result that the moral support of the people is lost; they cry for and obtain new generals, and new plans of campaign, not based on expert knowledge and thought, with a consequent lengthening of the war or even defeat.

On the other hand, the desire of the people to know how the war is progressing and how fare their men, is one that should be fulfilled.

The press is their means of this information and their mouthpiece.

The right correlation of these opposing interests will furnish the solution of the proper relationship between the Army and the press in war.

In our country, with its numerous newspapers expressing the ideas and wishes of different political parties, the numerous telegraph, cable lines, and wireless stations furnishing means of communication within and without the country, the difficulty of proper control is great, and shows that unless the question is taken up now and studied with great care, and unless proper regulations are made at the outbreak of war, we will be in a worse position than England.

9. WILLINGNESS OF THE PRESS TO COOPERATE WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

It is known from the statements of prominent newspaper men that the responsible press associations and newspapers will meet the Government half way in this matter.

In 1913 Mr. J. C. O'Loughlin delivered a lecture before the Army War College in which he advocated publicity for the Army in peace, but in time of war "a censorship so strict, so thorough, that the operations of the armies, including the units composing them, would not even be referred to in the press." In that "twilight zone" between the above two conditions, when preparations for hostilities accompany diplomatic negotiations to avoid war, he would have the War Department appeal "to press associations and newspapers, conservative and yellow, to print no information respecting mobilization, movements, and anything which might affect injuriously our operations." He read letters from Mr. Melville E. Stone, general manager of the Associated Press; Mr. James Keeley, general man-

ager of the Chicago Tribune; and Mr. Frederic Palmer, all indorsing censorship and expressing belief that the selection of the right kind of war correspondents would make censorship possible.

One of our naval observers, in a report on press censorship in Great Britain during the present war, quotes two American journalists, as follows:

The trouble with the censorship is easily discerned; all the difficulties that have been encountered are readily chargeable to one thing—lack of preparation. * * *

In the United States the censorship would be as new and strange as it is in England; therefore every preparation should be made to take up the work in time of war. The Government in Washington should send officers to study all the telegraph and cable systems and locate all wires crossing the borders, and wireless stations, and so forth. More important still, a study should be made of the requirements of the newspapers, whose support and cooperation the Government must have, and whose needs, after all, are only the needs of the people. If officers detailed to investigate this problem were to go to newspaper editors and managers they would be given a hearty welcome and full cooperation, particularly at this moment, when censorship matters are uppermost in the minds of newspaper people. If an understanding is reached with the press in advance, the Government will find it easier in time of war to control the press and to guide it. Officers should also go to the great press associations of the country and study their system of disseminating news. The headquarters of these press associations would be where the censors would have to be stationed in order to control publication in American newspapers.

10. FIELD SERVICE REGULATIONS.

In our Field Service Regulations of 1914 there are regulations providing a censorship and governing correspondents with field armies. Therein is provided a chief censor at Washington, but his duties are not stated. These rules seem to be full and ample, but they apply only to censorship with the active armies in the field. They have had a limited trial in the recent occupation of Vera Cruz.

11. STUDY OF QUESTION BY GENERAL STAFF IN 1908.

In 1908 the General Staff made an exhaustive study of this question. Therein the constitutional aspect of restriction of publication was carefully considered.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS OF WAR COLLEGE DIVISION, GENERAL STAFF.

In February, 1915, the War College Division, by direction of the Chief of Staff, submitted a memorandum on the control of the press in war. After a full discussion of the question, the following recommendations were made:

(a) That an officer of the Army, designated by the Secretary of War, and an officer of the Navy, designated by the Secretary of the Navy, be directed to consult with representatives of the press associations and managers of leading newspapers of the country in drafting legislation authorizing the President to issue regulations for control of publication and censorship of telegraph, cable, wireless, and mail communication wherever such course may seem to him necessary for the defense of the country.

(b) That such draft, after approval by the Judge Advocate General of the Army, either be submitted to Congress at once or held ready to submit when conditions seem to warrant favorable action, as the President may deem proper.

(c) That whether or not such draft be now submitted, regulations to render an effective censorship be drawn up and careful plans be prepared for execution of the censorship under such regulations. These should include record of each cable, telegraph, and wireless station which would require supervision by a censor; list of all newspapers, periodicals, and correspondents; selection of Army and Navy officers, preferably retired, and of experienced newspaper men as personnel of the censorate. Following the British plan, the Assistant Secretary of War could well be assigned as director of the censorate.

(d) In time of national peril and absence of legislation, the President should at once direct a censorship of all communication by mail, cable, wire, or wireless; if necessary, declaring martial law to an extent necessary to effect arbitrary suppression of publication or communication of matter that might prove detrimental to national defense or useful to a possible enemy.

It is of vital importance that all these steps be taken before the occasion arises for application of a censorship. We may anticipate greater confusion and dissatisfaction than Great Britain experienced if no plans be prepared and no personnel be selected for execution thereof until the time arrives when censorship and control of the press become as necessary as in Europe in 1914.

The following tentative draft suggests the character of legislation recommended:

A BILL To confer upon the President power to restrict the publication of certain information inconsistent with the defense of the country.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That whenever in his judgment the defense of the country requires such action, the President may issue a proclamation prohibiting the publication of all news referring to the armed forces of the Government or the means and measures that may be contemplated for defense of the country, except when such publication shall have been duly authorized, and he may issue such regulations as may be necessary to render such prohibition effective.

SEC. 2. That after the President shall have issued such proclamation as is authorized by section 1 of this act it shall be unlawful for any person within the jurisdiction of the United States to publish or cause or procure to be published, or to assist in the publication of any information, facts, rumors, or news prohibited by the terms of the proclamation or regulations issued under this act, except when such publication shall have been duly authorized under such regulations, and any person who so offends may be punished by a fine of not more than \$10,000, or by a term of imprisonment of not more than three years, or both.

SEC. 3. That when in the judgment of the President the defense of the country no longer requires prohibition of publication he shall issue a proclamation revoking any proclamation issued under section 1 of this act; thereupon the pains and penalties authorized by this act, except for violations of regulations committed prior to such revocation, shall cease.

NOTE.—In this draft details of means for effective enforcement are purposely omitted, as they should be the subject of regulations authorized and could thus be changed whenever conditions warrant change.

13. REFERENCES ON FILE IN WAR COLLEGE DIVISION.

There are on file in the War College Division voluminous reports on censorship from our military attachés and observers with the countries now at war. These should be studied by any board that may be appointed to draw up regulations on the subject for our own service.

